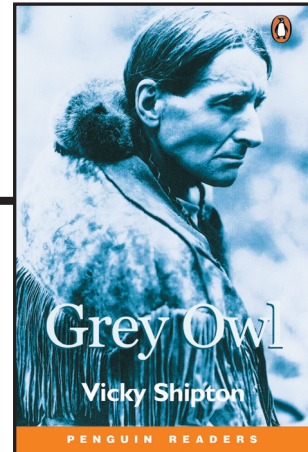


Penguin Readers Factsheets

Teacher's Notes

Grey Owl

by Vicky Shipton



Level 3 – Pre-Intermediate Grey Owl

Summary

In 1938 the newspapers revealed a surprising secret. Grey Owl, the world's most famous North American Indian, did not have one drop of Indian blood. He had grown up on the south coast of England. As an English schoolboy, he dreamed about Indians. When he was 17, he left his boring office and sailed off to Canada.

He lived with the Ojibwa tribe around the Great Lakes and learned the ways of the forest. He married an Ojibwa woman. Archie was not good at family relationships, however, and he left his wife when their daughter was three months old.

He worked in the forests, trapping animals and guiding tourists through the natural environment. He began a new life in a cabin in the forest with a young Iriquois Indian called Anaharea. She was shocked by the cruelty of trapping and persuaded Archie to start caring for animals instead of shooting them. They kept orphan beaver kits as companions in their cabin.

At this time Archie began a new career as a writer. Adopting the name Grey Owl, he wrote articles for European magazines, he travelled and gave talks, and wrote three best-selling books. He spoke for all American Indians and he became a celebrity. His busy schedule tired him and he died in 1938. The story about his real identity came out soon after.

Extra facts about Grey Owl

- Archie Belaney had blue eyes.
- The Ojibwa Indians gave Archie the name Wa-Sha-Quon-Asin, which means Grey Owl or He-Who-Flies-By-Night. They were good judges of character: Archie ran away from his responsibilities many times in his life.
- The book describes Archie's unloving childhood. His lazy, alcoholic father left the family when Archie was a baby. His teenage mother was forced to give Archie into the care of two severe aunts, where his upbringing was cold and hard. He had a brother, who stayed with his mother, and they occasionally visited Archie as he was growing up. His brother suffered brain damage during the First World War, and never recovered.
- Archie was a great pianist. When he lived with Bill Guppy (see page 12), he entertained the family in the evening, picking up and playing their songs. Bill described him as "a wizard on the keys."
- The beaver kits that Archie and Anaharea rescue (see page 28) were orphaned by Archie – he had trapped the adult beaver. Once he had given them names – McGinnis and McGinty – and learned to care for them, he gave up trapping.

- Archie was fond of blowing things up. He learned to make gunpowder as a boy and made his first big explosion at the timber merchants where he worked in Hastings (illustrated on page 10). He blew up a chimney and a big pile of wood, half destroying the building. Later in the story, we find him blowing up a beaver's lodge (see pages 22–3), before his conversion to animal protection instead of hunting and trapping.

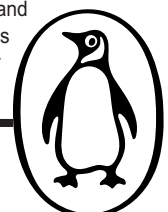
Background and themes

At the time that Archie Belaney was born, there was growing interest in native Americans and their disappearing lifestyle. The romantic idea of the brave American Indian, described in Fenimore Cooper's *Last of the Mohicans* (1826), was a popular one, and young Archie became entranced by it. He was also a fan of Longfellow's famous poem *The Song of Hiawatha* (1855), which reproduces traditional American Indian stories.

Grey Owl's writings gave the world an important vision of Canada's northern wilderness and provoked the debate between using land and conserving it that continues today. He described it as a "land of shadows and hidden trails, lost rivers and unknown lakes, a region of soft-footed creatures." (from "The Passing of the Last Frontier", *Country Life*, 2 March 1929). His main concerns were the dwindling numbers of some varieties of animals and types of tree. He was largely responsible for building up a new population of beavers in the Riding Mountain National Park, where trapping had decimated their numbers.

Taking care of the environment is an increasingly popular issue. There are many organizations devoted to the protection of nature, continuing the work started by Grey Owl, including the radical international group Greenpeace and the UK group Friends of the Earth. They make dramatic protests against, for example, the dumping of the Brent Spar oil platform in the North Sea by giant oil company Shell, and the cutting down of the Central American rainforests for wood and to make way for cattle grazing. They campaign against human activities that lead to global warming, such as increasing car use, and that change the delicate ecological balance of the earth, such as the introduction of GM crops. Today's high-tech protesting, which uses the internet and mobile phones as well as books and posters, grew out of the low-tech protesting of Grey Owl's day – giving lectures and publishing books and articles.

Relationships between parents and children and between husbands and wives is an important theme in this story. Archie Belaney had four children, but apparently could not relate to any of them. His own childhood (see notes above and the story) must account for his attitude. Abandoned by his father and unloved himself, he was unable to give love to his own children. By contrast, he was able to care for



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and bring up orphaned beavers in a way that he never could look after his own children. Perhaps he was too afraid of the responsibility, and he preferred to deny their existence. He did send money to his children, but there was no emotional contact. He had five wives or partners, and left all of them except the last one. People are divided about Archie. Most of those who have read his books think he did more good than harm and admire him as a pioneering conservationist. Others who focus on his terrible treatment of his wives and children and his lies find it more difficult to treat him as a hero.

A movie was made of Grey Owl's story in 1999, starring Pierce Brosnan as Archie and Annie Galipeau as Anahareo. It was directed by Richard Attenborough. The movie changes the actual story slightly, by revealing Archie's true identity before his death.

Communicative activities

The following teacher-led activities cover the same sections of text as the exercises at the back of the reader, and supplement those exercises. For supplementary exercises covering shorter sections of the book, see the photocopiable Student's Activities pages of this Factsheet. These are primarily for use with class readers but, with the exception of discussion and pair/group work questions, can also be used by students working alone in a self-access center.

ACTIVITIES BEFORE READING THE BOOK

Discussion. There are many issues about nature for the world today: food and farming; cutting down trees; saving wild areas for animals and birds; using cars; having many things; eating meat; wearing fur coats; tourists. With the class, formulate a question for each issue. For example: Do you eat meat? Do you wear fur? Do you or does your family drive everywhere by car? Write the questions on the board. Take a vote on each question. Does the class think this is an important subject?

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING A SECTION

Pages 1–11

- 1 Put students into small groups. Each group thinks of adjectives to describe the different stages of Archie's life: as a baby, as a young boy, as an older boy, as a young man. Compare adjectives across the class.
- 2 Students work in groups of four. They take the parts of Archie, his two aunts and his grandmother. He has just blown up the pile of wood outside his office. He wants to go to Canada. They want him to stay and do a sensible job. He must forget his silly dreams. Students work out a conversation.

Pages 12–23

- 1 Divide the class in half. One half looks for things in this section that Archie can be proud of. The other half looks for things Archie would not be proud of. Note their findings on the board and talk about them.
- 2 Discuss the Ojibwa way of life. What would students like about it? What would they not like?

Pages 24–41

- 1 Get students to invent new identities for themselves. They secretly write a few sentences about the 'new' them. Collect them in, shuffle them and give them out again at random. Each student reads out an identity. The class guess whose it is.

- 2 What would be a good way to remember Grey Owl's message about the natural world? Should we remember him or his message? Invite students to make suggestions after they read page 41 of the book.

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING THE BOOK

- 1 Divide the class into pairs or threes. Give each group a page number: 2, 4, 14–15, 18, 21, 23, 25, 27, 30–1, 33, 35, 37, 39. Ask them to look at the photograph or picture on their page and prepare two or three sentences about it. It can be a description or something about Grey Owl's life at this time. Groups show their picture to the class and describe it.
- 2 Discussion. Grey Owl protested about the destruction of the natural world by giving lectures and writing books and articles. How do protest groups get their message across today?

Glossary

It will be useful for your students to know these new words. They are practised in the exercises at the back of the book. (The definitions are based on those in the Longman Active Study Dictionary.)

Pages 1–11

audience (n) when people watch or listen to someone, they are the audience

beaver (n) a wild Canadian animal (see pictures on pages 31, 35 and 39)

blow up (v) to destroy something with a loud noise and fire

feather (n) people have hair, birds have feathers

owl (n) a large night bird; it catches and eats small animals at night

native (adj) something or someone that is born in a place is native to it, for example the Ojibwa Indians are native to Canada

nature (n) everything in the world that humans have not made: animals, trees, the weather

savage (adj) someone or something that is wild

Pages 12–23

army (n) a country's soldiers are its army

canoe (n) a long, narrow wooden boat used by Native Americans

hunt (v) to look for animals with guns and knives

lodge (n) a beaver's home (see picture on page 31)

ranger (n) a person who looks after an area of public land

soul (n) the part of a person that is not their body

trap (v) to catch an animal with a trap; a trap is a piece of equipment for catching animals in the forest

tribe (n) a group of American Indians who live together in the same area; the main tribe in this story is the Ojibwa

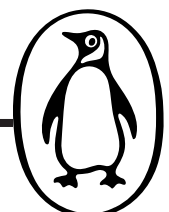
Pages 24–41

cabin (n) a little house in the forest; made of wood, often only one room

fur (n) humans have hair, animals have fur

pony (n) a young horse

publish (v) to print copies of a book and sell it

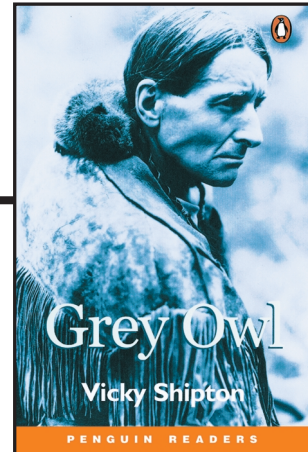


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Student's activities

Grey Owl

by Vicky Shipton



Level 3 – Pre-Intermediate Grey Owl Photocopiable

These activities can be done alone or with one or more other students. Pair/group-only activities are marked.

ACTIVITIES BEFORE READING THE BOOK

- 1 Read the introduction on page iv. Answer these questions.
 - (a) Which animal was in danger in Canada?
 - (b) What happened in the forests in Canada every year?
 - (c) Grey Owl was honest about the natural world. Was he honest about his own life?
- 2 Which of these words will be important in the story, do you think? Look at the Contents on page iii for help.
trapping bicycles weddings books the theater
beavers the Ojibwa tribe soldiers the American president
British magazines

When you finish the story, look again at your answers. Were you right?

ACTIVITIES WHILE READING THE BOOK

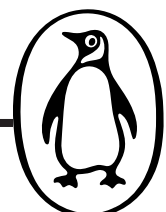
Pages 1–11

- 1 Are these sentences right or wrong?
 - (a) People in London in 1937 loved listening to Grey Owl.
 - (b) People in Europe did not think there was going to be another war.
 - (c) Most people thought white men and Indians were equal.
 - (d) When Christopher Columbus reached America, he thought he was in Asia.
 - (e) The Indians in Canada looked after the natural world.
 - (f) People in the 1930s already knew about the problems of the natural world.
- 2 Work with another student. You live in London in the 1930s. You work in boring office jobs. You have been to hear Grey Owl. What do you say to each other on the way home. Have a conversation.
- 3 Read page 5. Why are these things important in the story?
 - (a) Grey Owl could speak English well.
 - (b) He gave many talks in England and North America.
 - (c) The North Bay *Nugget*.
 - (d) Hastings, England.
 - (e) Kittie and George Belaney.
- 4 Read the picture story of Archie's early life. Close the book and put these verbs in the past form in the right space.
blow up bring go learn leave sail say send start want
Archie's father (a)_____ the family and (b)_____ to America.
Archie's grandmother (c)_____ his mother away. Archie
(d)_____ to play the piano. He (e)_____ to be an owl. He (f)_____ small animals home. He (g)_____ work in a boring office. He
(h)_____ some wood outside his office. He (i)_____ goodbye to his aunts and grandmother and (j)_____ to Canada.

- 5 What do you think Archie's life will be like when he gets to Canada? Talk to other students.

Pages 12–23

- 1 Who
 - (a) lived on Bear Island?
 - (b) made smaller and smaller special areas for Indians to live in?
 - (c) ruled Canada between 1763 and 1931?
 - (d) was very sick in 1907?
 - (e) lived next to a beaver lodge?
 - (f) was not a "Texan Ranger"?
 - (g) hid in the woods with Archie when the police were looking for him?
 - (h) did Archie marry in 1917?
 - (i) were Agnes and Johnny Jero?
 - (j) gave Archie a home when he was unhappy?
- 2 Work with another student. One of you is Angele. The other is Ivy. Imagine that Ivy comes to Canada and meets Angele in Bisco. What do they say? Work out a conversation.
- 3 Put these jobs in the order that Archie did them.
 - (a) a Canadian soldier
 - (b) a fire ranger in a Canadian park
 - (c) a hotel worker on Lake Temagami
 - (d) a shop assistant in Toronto
 - (e) a tourist guide
 - (f) a trapper and a ranger near Bisco
- 4 Answer these questions.
 - (a) What kind of boat did Archie use on Lake Temagami?
 - (b) What were the big tribe of Ojibwa, Ottawa, and Potawatomi called?
 - (c) What was different about Archie when Bill Guppy saw him in 1908?
 - (d) What was Archie's book *Sajo and the Beaver People* about?
 - (e) Why did the police want Archie in 1915, when he was living with Marie?
 - (f) What did he do in Digby, Nova Scotia, in May 1915?
 - (g) What lesson did the First War teach Archie about the modern world?
 - (h) Why did Alex Espaniel almost tell Archie to leave his home?
- 5 Make a list of the things Archie learned from Bill Guppy and from the Ojibwa Indians. Compare your list with another student's.



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Student's activities

Pages 24–41

- 1 Correct these sentences about Archie and Anahareo.
 - (a) Gertrude Bernard was a white woman from the city.
 - (b) Her friends called her 'Pony' because she wanted an exciting life.
 - (c) Archie told Anahareo that he was an English boy.
 - (d) Anahareo loved trapping with Archie.
 - (e) Anahareo was happy to speak to audiences in cities with Archie.
 - (f) When Archie was writing at home, he wanted Anahareo with him all the time.
 - (g) Anahareo finally left Archie when their daughter was born.
- 2 Put these words in pairs to make sentences.
 - (a) Beavers look after
 - (b) Their big front teeth
 - (c) They use their big, flat tails and big back feet
 - (d) They use their teeth
 - (e) Beavers can cut down
 - (f) Indians killed beavers
 - (g) The entrance to a beaver lodge
 - (i) are bright orange.
 - (ii) for biting through trees.
 - (iii) is under the water.
 - (iv) for their meat and fur.
 - (v) for swimming.
 - (vi) their babies for two years.
 - (vii) trees and stop rivers.
- 3 Which of Grey Owl's books would you like to read? Why? Talk to another student.

- 4 Answer these questions.
 - (a) Why didn't Grey Owl like the title *Men of the Last Frontier*?
 - (b) Grey Owl made a lot of trouble in Bisco. What reason does the writer give for this?
 - (c) Why was Anahareo important in *Pilgrims of the Wild*?
 - (d) Why do you think people liked Archie's books?
 - (e) Have you seen trees cut down? Where were they? Why were they cut down?
 - (f) How did the *Nugget* find out Archie's secret?
 - (g) Why do you think Archie chose to speak in Hastings?
 - (h) Who recognized Archie in Hastings?
- 5 Archie went back to visit his old aunts in Hastings. What do you think they talked about? Were the aunts angry with him or proud of him? Did Archie have good memories of them or bad?

ACTIVITIES AFTER READING THE BOOK

- 1 Grey Owl is remembered for two things: his message about the natural world and his lies. Which do you think is more important: the things you say or the way you live your life? Write down some ideas.
- 2 Look at the description of Canada on pages 14 and 15. Write a similar description of your country.
- 3 The North Bay *Nugget* decides not to tell its readers about Grey Owl's real name (see page 38). They like his message and they do not want to destroy him. What do you think? Is it right for newspapers to keep back information? Should they publish everything they know? Write down some ideas.
- 4 Find out more about Indian tribes in Canada today. What are the laws like? How much land do they have? Do they still follow the old ways or do they live like people in the cities? Write about them. Tell other students.

